the edge, and that blue suddenly disappears, for it was merely a reflection of the sky on a white salty crust, which burns your feet and hurts your eyes, splendidly dazzling. Fragile, it gives way under your steps, since it is nothing but the thin surface of a sea of moving mud in which caravans are swallowed up.

At that officers* mess the army doctor next to me interests me with what he says of the south. For a long time he lived at Ouargla. He had even been at El-Goleah and remembered the soldiers marching in the sand. Often in those moving sands, burning and vibrating in the steady sunlight, a sort of odd dizziness would seize them because of constantly feeling the earth give under their feet; even when they stop, the unsteadiness continues and the earth still seems lo flee them. Occasionally in the middle of the horrible sands they would encounter a narrow vein of limestone, something compressed and hard, just wide enough for each soldier in turn to place both feet on it for a second and pull himself together on a resistant surface.

To punish a soldier they make him "follow"; to march at the tail of the contingent is killing. Those in front cannot worry about the stragglers; at times some drop out . . . who lose their footing, fall, are swallowed up by the desert. The last ones run along in the stifling dust raised by the battalion and, on this soft earth, still softer for having been trampled by the others, if they lose their footing they arc lost; they watch the others disappear in the distance and the hawks that fly behind the marching battalion stop, wait, and then approach.

In this sand, often, gypsum crystals, thin pointed fragments, shine like mica; on the road to Droh we found some stones that, when broken, were transparent on the inside like glass.

On the road to El Oued we gathered some of those strange mineral

flowers which are called "desert roses" and which, gray like the sand, are a bit of conglutinated sand.

Biskra

The sounds of the Negro drum draw us* Negro music! How often I heard it last year! How often I got up from my work to hear it! No tones, just rhythm; no melodic instrument, just long drums, tom-toms, and castanets. . . . *"Florences ferulas et grandia liliaquassans"*[1] ® castanets that in their hands make almost the sound of a downpour. In a trio they execute real compositions; uneven rhythm oddly cut by syncopated notes, which drives one mad and sets every muscle in motion. They are the musicians of funereal, gay, and religious ceremonies; I have seen

[10] "Shaking flowering branches and tall lilies." (Virgil; *Bucolics,* X, line 25.)